

THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

A Detective Story
by J. S. Fletcher

Store Hours, 9 to 5:30

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SPARGO spliced his man to the chair in a fashion that would have done credit to a sailor. He let Myerst literally unable to move either hand or foot, and great cursed him from crown to heel of his pains. "That'll do," said Breton at last. He dropped his revolver into his pocket and turned to the two old men. Elphick averted his eyes and sank into a chair in the darkest corner of the room; old Cardlestone shook as with pain and muttered words which the two young men could not catch. "Guardian," continued Breton, "don't be frightened! And don't you be frightened, either, Mr. Cardlestone. There's nothing to be afraid of. Just whatever there may be later on. It seems to me that Mr. Spargo and I came just in time. Now, guardian, what was this fellow after?"

Old Elphick lifted his head and shook it; he was plainly on the verge of tears; as for Cardlestone, it was evident that his nerve was completely gone. And Breton pointed Spargo to an old corner cupboard.

"Spargo," he said, "I'm pretty sure you'll find whisky in there. Give them both a stiff dose; they've broken up. Now, guardian," he continued, "what Spargo had carried out this order, what was he after? Shall I suggest it? Was it—blackmail?"

Cardlestone began to whimper; Elphick nodded his head. "Yes, yes," he muttered. "Blackmail! That was it—blackmail. He—he got money—papers—from us. They're on him." Breton turned on the captive with a look of contempt.

"I thought as much, Mr. Myerst," he said. "Spargo, let's see what he has on him."

Spargo began to search the prisoner's pockets. He laid out everything on the table as he found it. It was plain that Myerst had contemplated some sort of fight or a long, long journey. There was a quantity of loose gold; a number of banknotes of the more easily negotiated denominations; various foreign securities, realizable in Paris. And there was an open check, signed by Cardlestone for £10,000, and another, with Elphick's name at the foot, also open, for half that amount. Breton examined all these matters as Spargo handed them out. He turned to old Elphick.

"Guardian," he said, "why have you or Mr. Cardlestone given this man these checks and securities? What hold has he on you?"

Old Cardlestone began to whimper afresh; Elphick turned a troubled face on his ward.

"He—he threatened to accuse us of the murder of Marbury," he faltered. "We—we didn't see that we had a chance."

"What does he know of the murder of Marbury and of you in connection with it?" demanded Breton. "Come—tell me the truth now."

"He's been investigating—so he says," answered Elphick. "He lives in that house in Middle Temple lane, you know, in the top-floor rooms above Cardlestone's. And—and he says he's the fullest evidence against Cardlestone—and against me as an accessory after the fact."

"And—it's a lie?" asked Breton.

"A lie!" answered Elphick. "Of course, it's a lie. But—he's so clever that—that—"

"That you don't know how you could prove it otherwise," said Breton. "Ah! And so this fellow lives over Mr. Cardlestone there, does he? That may account for a good many things. Now we must have the police here." He sat down at the table and drew the writing materials to him. "Look here, Spargo," he continued, "I'm going to write a note to the superintendent of police at Hawes—there's a farm half a mile from here where I can get a man to ride down to Hawes with the note. Now, if you want to send a wire to the Watchman, draft it out, and he'll take it with him."

Elphick began to move in his corner.

"Must the police come?" he said.

"The police must come," answered Breton firmly. "Go ahead with your wire, Spargo, while I write this note." Three-quarters of an hour later, when Breton came back from the farm, he sat down at Elphick's side and laid his hand on the old man's.

"Now, guardian," he said, quietly, "you've got to tell us the truth."

Myerst Explains

IT HAD been apparent to Spargo, from the moment of his entering the cottage, that the two old men were suffering badly from shock and fright; Cardlestone still sat in his corner shivering and trembling; he looked incapable of explaining anything; Elphick was so very more fitted to speak. And when Breton issued his peremptory invitation to his guardian to tell the truth, Spargo intervened.

"For better leave him alone, Breton," he said in a low voice. "Don't you see the old chap's done up? They're both done up. We don't know what they've got through with this fellow before we came, and it's certain they've had no sleep. Leave it all till later—after all, we've found them and we've found him. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in Myerst's direction, and Breton involuntarily followed the movement. He caught the prisoner's eye, and Myerst laughed.

"I'd say you two young men think yourselves very clever," he said sneeringly. "Don't you, now?"

"We've been clever enough to catch you, anyway," retorted Breton. "And now we've got you'll keep you, until the police can relieve us of you."

"Oh!" said Myerst, with another sneering laugh.

"And on what charge do you propose to hand me over to the police? It strikes me you'll have some difficulty in formulating one, Mr. Breton."

Breton. "You've extorted money by menaces from these gentlemen, at any rate."

"Have I? How do you know they didn't intrust me with these cheques as their agent?" exclaimed Myerst. "Answer me that! Or, rather, let them answer for they dare. Here you, Cardlestone, you Elphick—didn't you give me these cheques as your agent? Speak up, now, and quick!"

Spargo, watching the two old men, saw them both quiver at the sound of Myerst's voice; Cardlestone, indeed, began to whimper softly.

"Look here, Breton," he said, whispering, "this scoundrel's got some hold on these two old chaps—they're frightened to death of him. I believe them could get some rest. Hold your tongue, Myerst. He added aloud, turning to Myerst. "When we want you to speak we'll tell you."

But Myerst laughed again.

"All very high and mighty, Mr. Spargo, of the Watchman!" he sneered. "And you're very clever, but not so clever as I am. Now, look here! Suppose—"

Spargo turned his back on him. He went over to old Cardlestone and felt with a look of concern.

"I say," he exclaimed. "He's more than frightened—he's ill! What's to be done?"

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

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Though "embroidered" applies to pretty nearly everything from the simplest tailleur (but of such good lines!) to that very dream of an "original" pictured—from *Martial et Armand*—all heavy white satin, embroidered in black paillettes, every one of which boasts its white bead center!

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In finest evora.
In black, navy blue, marine and partridge.

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Of serge or velours. Silk lined to waist.
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